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International Migratory Bird Day 2006 Highlights the Boreal Forest

Hundreds of National Wildlife Refuges across the country will be hosting events such as bird walks, open houses, festivals, wildlife lectures and demonstrations, as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service celebrates International Migratory Bird Day 2006 (IMBD). The Service will be joining with partners to recognize the ways birds have inspired people to become involved in conservation and to encourage individuals, corporations, and organizations to be a part of continuing efforts to conserve and protect America's bird populations.

"International Migratory Bird Day reminds us that wildlife does not recognize political or geographic boundaries," said Service Director Dale Hall. "This is a great way to celebrate birds, and the partnerships forged to conserve them."

An estimated 500 IMBD celebrations will take place at National Wildlife Refuges, fish hatcheries, field offices and at partnering organizations such as parks, zoos, and schools. This year's International Migratory Bird Day emphasizes the importance of boreal forest habitat. The day is officially recognized on May 12, but events will happen around the country throughout the year. For more information, press kits and educational materials on IMBD and boreal forest habitat or to locate an event near you, check out <http://www.birdday.org/>.

The boreal forest region of North America, which stretches across 3,500 miles from Alaska to the Atlantic Ocean, is the birthplace of billions of birds each year. It is critical to the survival of nearly half of all North American species, which return each year to the forest to breed. Most boreal-nesting birds spend at least some of the year in the United States. Scientists estimate that at least 20 percent of winter visitors to North American birdfeeders have returned after a summer in the boreal.

Numerous bird species visit the boreal region at some point during the year, but use it in a variety of ways. Most birds nest and breed there, returning to the U.S. or other countries throughout the western hemisphere to spend the winter. Some species spend the entire winter in the boreal, while others rely more on boreal wetlands for feeding and resting during migration.

The boreal forest ecosystem is a mosaic of interrelated habitats made up of forests, lakes, wetlands, rivers and tundra at its northern edge. The region is dominated by spruce, aspen, birch, poplar and larch or tamaracks. Thirty percent of North America's boreal is covered by wetlands, consisting of bogs, fens, marshes, and an estimated 1.5 million lakes, as well as some of the country's largest river systems.

The boreal floor is covered by a dense layer of organic matter made up of peat and moss that can be more than 10 feet thick in some areas. This cover is created when fallen trees, pine needles, leaves, and other plant remains fall to the ground and are prevented from decomposing by the cold boreal temperatures. This groundcover is particularly effective in storing carbon, and the boreal forests of Canada and Russia together store more carbon than any other terrestrial ecosystem on the planet.

International Migratory Bird Day was created in 1993 to focus public attention on the need to conserve birds and their habitats. This annual event celebrates one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird: its annual journey between summer and winter homes. Today, International Migratory Bird Day is recognized in Canada, the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean Islands, and Central America.

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